

*University of Dhaka*  
*Department of Television and Film Studies*  
*Faculty of Social Sciences'*

*TFP 302: Documentary*

**TFP 302: Documentary****Total Marks: 100****Credit: 4****Class Hours: Monday, 9.00 am-12.00****Consultation Hours: Monday, 12.00-1.00 pm****Instructor: Reffat Ferdous**

Course Instructor

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**Course Objectives:** This course will discuss the forms, strategies, structures and conventions of documentary film and video. Students will learn about the dominant and experimental modes of representation, important documentary movements and filmmakers and a number of documentary genres. Students will gain knowledge of the current theoretical debates and dilemmas in documentary filmmaking such as the treatment of subject and subject matter and construction and positioning of audiences.

**Students Evaluation:**

Documentary Script writing: 10%  
Project Book preparing and pitching: 15%  
Group Production: 20%  
Class attendance: 5 %

Course final: 50%

**Plagiarism Policy:**

Plagiarism is considered as a serious academic offence.

**Grading Scale:**

Marks obtained (%)	Grades	Grade Point
80-100	A+	4.00
75-79	A	3.75
70-74	A-	3.50
65-69	B+	3.25
60-64	B	3.00
55-59	B-	2.75
50-54	C+	2.50
45-49	C	2.25
40-44	D	2.00
Less than 40	F	0.00
	I	Incomplete
	W	Withdrawn

## Weekly Schedule

### Class 1: Introduction and History of Documentary Film

Plantinga, Carl R. (1997); *What is Nonfiction Film*; In 'Rhetoric and Representation in Nonfiction Film'; UK: Cambridge University Press, pg: 7-24

Nichols, Bill (2001); *How did Documentary Filmmaking Get Started*; In 'Introduction to Documentary'; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pg: 82 -98

*Screening & Analyzing: Man with a Movie Camera by Dziga Vertov*

### Class 2: Differences between Fiction and Non-fiction/Documentary Films

Nichols, Bill (2001). How Do Documentaries Differ from Other Types of Film In *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 99-138

### Class 3-5: Truths and Consequences: The Modes of Documentary

Nichols, Bill (2001). What Types of Documentary are There In *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 20-41

Cinema Verite and Direct cinema: An inclusion into the most defining cinematic practice of the 1960s In CIN% C3%89MA%20V% C3%89RIT% C3%89%20and%20Direct%20Cinema.pdf

*Screening: Atomic Café (1982) by Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader, pierce Rafferty (Compilation)*  
*High School by Fredric Wiseman, (Observational mood)*  
*Paris is Burning by Jeny Livingstone (Observational and Participatory mood)*

### Class 6: Avant Garde Movement and Documentary Film

Avant Garde and Experimental films' contribution to documentary

- Barnouw, E. (1983). *Documentary: A history of the non-fiction film, revised edition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hilderbrand, L. (2009). Experiments in documentary: Contradiction, uncertainty, change. *Millennium Film Journal, Spring 2009*(51), 2-10

### Class 7: Key Concepts of Docudrama and Mock-Documentary

Lipkin, Paget, and Roscoe, "Docudrama and Mock-Documentary: Defining Terms, Proposing Canons." *Docufictions: Essays on the Intersection of Documentary and Fiction Filmmaking*

*Screening & Analyzing: This is Spinal Tap (1984) by Rob Reiner*

### Class 8: The Origin of Documentary Ciema: Ethnographic Film

Rothman, William (1998); *The Filmmaker as Hunter* In 'Documenting the Documentary' (Ed. Barry Keith Grant); Detroit: Wayne State UP, pg: 23-39

*Screening & Analyzing: Nanook of the North by Robert Flaherty*

### **Class 9: Documentary and Ethics**

Nichols, Bill (2001); *Why Are Ethical Issues Central to Documentary Filmmaking* In 'Introduction to Documentary'; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pg: 1-19

*Screening & Analyzing: Titicut Follies by Frederic Wiseman & A Tale of the Sundarban by Mainul Huda*

### **Class 10-11: The American and British Documentary Film Movement**

Keil, Charlie (1998); *American Documentary Finds Its Voice* In *Documenting the Documentary* (Ed. Barry Keith Grant); Detroit: Wayne State UP, pg: 103-121

*Screening: The Plow that broke the plains and The City*

Paul Swann; *Introduction: The British Documentary Film Movement* Electronic Resource

*Screening: Night Mail*

### **Class 12-14: Documentary Script Writing and Proposal Presentation**

The classes will cover the practical portion of documentary film that is: writing for documentary, knowing documentary styles, research, essential script elements, POV (point-of-view), writing narration, sound and visual etc. After these classes' students will be placed into five/six groups. Each group will then be responsible for making a short documentary based on the modes/styles of documentary.

Rabiger, Michel (2004), (1) *Evidence and Point of View in Documentary*; (2) *Time, Development and Structure* & (3) *Authorship Challenges and Opportunities* In *Directing the Documentary*, Focal Press, pg: 58-99

**Appendix 1: Twenty Important documentaries and Makers to know about**

**1. Robert Flaherty, *Nanook of the North* (USA, 1922).** The seminal documentary that seems like ethnographic observation but is in fact carefully staged throughout. Silent, but available with music.

**2. Dziga Vertov, *The Man with the Movie Camera* (USSR, 1929).** The exuberant life of a movie camera in late 1920s Moscow as it penetrates every house, factory, and street in search of cinematic Truth. A humorous silent masterpiece of montage.

**3. Luis Buñuel, *Land Without Bread* (Spain, 1932).** Early sound film by the surrealist master that uses an ironic narration and romantic era Brahms to emulate a travelogue. The subject meanwhile is starving villagers living in abject poverty.

**4. Basil Wright and Harry Watt, *Night Mail* (GB, 1936).** British classic set on a mail train running overnight from London to Scotland. Most of the action was re-enacted in a railway carriage specially lit and rocked in a studio. Notable for Benjamin Britten score and poetic narrative by W.H. Auden—both capitalizing on the inherent rhythms of the train and the postal work.

**5. Pare Lorentz, *The River* (USA, 1937).** An influential ecology film about disastrous flooding in the Mississippi Basin and the abuse of the land causing it. Arresting imagery, superb montage, spare commentary, and Virgil Thomson's magisterial score.

**6. Humphrey Jennings, *Fires Were Started* (1943).** A single night with a single firefighting unit during the London wartime Blitz, "an astonishingly intimate portrait of an isolated and besieged Britain"<sup>9</sup> and the firemen who risked their lives fighting nightly blazes. Avoids fervid patriotism in favor of an ironical, poetic gaze.

**7. Alain Resnais, *Night and Fog* (France, 1955).** Weaving together past and present, Resnais summons us through Jean Cayrol's narration to become an inmate in a nightmarish world of the Nazi extermination camps.

**8. Fred Wiseman, *The Titicut Follies* (USA, 1967).** Unforgettable "direct cinema" pure observational documentary. Life in an institution for the criminally insane borders on the surreal for the cruelty of the system toward the inmates.

**9. Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961).** The seminal participatory documentary in which the filmmakers ask Parisians in the street if they are happy, then turn the camera on their own process of inquiry.

**10. The Maysles Brothers and Charlotte Zwerin, *Salesman* (USA, 1969).** Classic handheld observational documentary about bible salesmen with profound things to say about the unreachability of the American dream for those on the fringes.

**11. Werner Herzog, *Land of Silence and Darkness* (Germany, 1971).** A (mostly) observational film that travels deep inside the experience of the deafblind and gives a stunning idea of what absolute solitude must be like.

12. **Donald Brittain, *Volcano* (Canada, 1977).** Vividly imaginative biography of Malcolm Lowrie, author of *Under the Volcano*, that takes us deep inside the lurid world of a heartbroken English alcoholic adrift in Mexico. The film has a wit and intensity that undoubtedly come from Brittain himself being an alcoholic like Lowrie and understanding his subject's frustrations intimately.
13. **Ira Wohl, *Best Boy* (USA, 1979).** A family is in crisis as the aging parents confront what to do for their 50-year-old handicapped son. A superb biographical film that is both tender and tough. Long, long moments of wonderful sustained observation.
14. **Eduardo Coutinho, *Twenty Years Later* (Brazil, 1984).** The story of a forbidden film project about a murdered labor leader and his family. One by one, Coutinho traces the family members, who were dispersed and lost to each other. Each encounter is an emotional confrontation; each story is the result of a government's brutality toward its dissidents.
15. **Michael Apted, *28 Up* (GB, 1986).** A 21-year longitudinal study of a dozen or so 6-year-olds as they become adults. A participatory film composed mostly of sensitive, probing interview footage that adds up to a profound indictment of a class-determined social system.
16. **Marlon Riggs, *Tongues Untied* (USA, 1989).** Through a series of imaginative, elliptical, and disturbingly urgent tellings and performances, Riggs, who died of AIDS, shows what it is like to be black and gay in a racist, homophobic society.
17. **Errol Morris, *The Thin Blue Line* (1989).** A formalist documentary *noir* using re-enactment, movie clips, and a gallery of Texan law enforcement types whom Morris faces with his unblinking interview style. Pursuing justice for a falsely imprisoned man, Morris's film uses a strongly visual style, a minimalist Philip Glass score, and meticulous re-examination of a few key details in a bid to uncover the actual murderer.
18. **Michael Moore, *Roger and Me* (USA, 1989).** Ambush journalism, hilarious satire, and leftist sympathy for the working class come together. Playing the role of a simple-minded American worker, Moore tries to corner GM's chairman in order to ask why he's sending work abroad and laying GM's hometown to waste.
19. **Henry Hampton's *Blackside, Inc., Eyes on the Prize* series (USA, 1990).** Civil rights history told by those who risked their lives to fight American racism. Using much wonderful archive footage, the series feels personally experienced and told.
20. **Chris Durlacher, *George Orwell: A Life in Pictures* (GB, 2003).** A biography of George Orwell. Lacking any movie footage or recording of Orwell himself, the film boldly recreates Orwell by putting his written words in the mouth of an actor who makes us believe he *is* Orwell. The producers even recreated fake childhood footage. It all works when it shouldn't.

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